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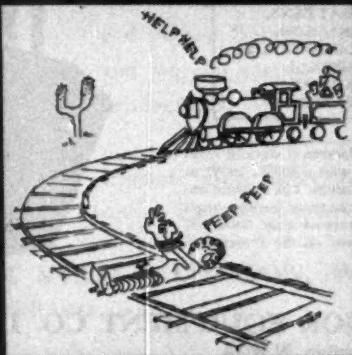
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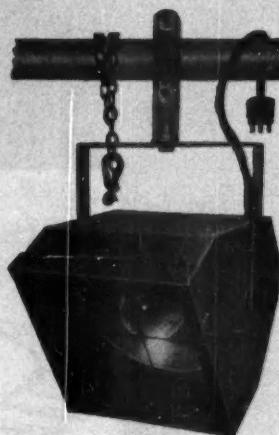
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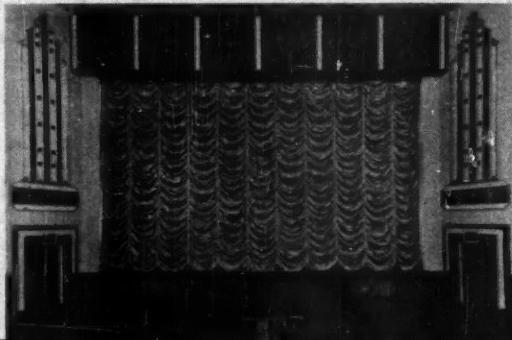
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DRAMA

The Quarterly Theatre Review

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NEW SERIES

AUTUMN 1961

NUMBER 62

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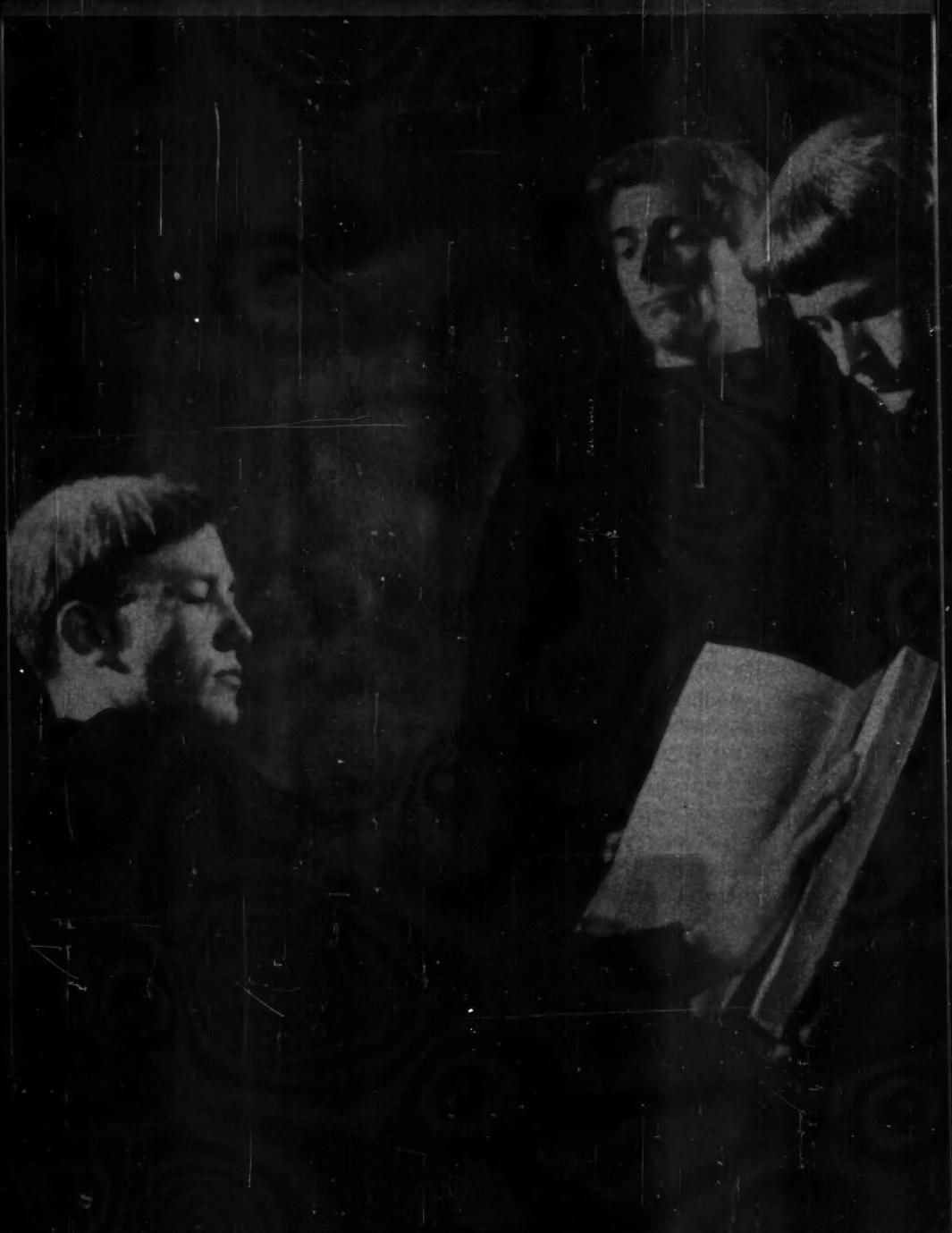
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A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION



'LUTHER', by John Osborne, at the Royal Court Theatre. Albert Finney as Martin Luther.

HOUSING PROBLEM

THE National Theatre, for which the British Drama League has campaigned since its birth, has passed from a request to a reality. That the order to start came from a Chancellor of the Exchequer who was demanding renewed economies on a wide front shows that he has realized the strength and justice of the demand. It also warns us against taking no for a final answer.

There is much yet to be agreed, especially about the future use of the Old Vic, far too much to be considered immediately and briefly in this place. We must await upon events. But one point is obvious. The existence of drama's temple in the Capital does not remove the problem of the parish churches. It makes it the more urgent.

Immediately after the Chancellor's concession the Arts Council published the second section of its Report on the Housing of the Arts in Great Britain. This covers 'The Needs of the English Provinces' and is a bargain at the price of 5s. Not only does it advocate policy but it contains a full record of what premises the art of theatre still occupies and what building is proposed or going forward.

The nation must speak and act for itself now that London is to have the National Theatre. It would be monstrously unfair if the Chancellor were to say that he has spent so much on the capital that he can spare no more for the counties. The London County Council has set an example by forcing the Chancellor's hand by its own willingness to do its share and even more than its share. The excellent principle of national-local partnership has been established and must be retained.

A suggestion put forward in the Report is the foundation of Local Arts Trusts. 'A well-organised, determined body of influential citizens need not exceed fifty in number to become the agency of a new conception of citizenship'.

Resolutions are cheap. Actions need money and a triple source of supply is indicated, the Local Authority, local industry and commerce, and the Arts Council itself. At present every pound of the Arts Council's grant is in request, but, the Report adds, 'the existence in the country of ten or a dozen powerful Arts Trusts might prove a potent factor in persuading Parliament to vote the Arts Council the additional funds for sustaining an even and more systematic diffusion of the arts'.

With present ratings the Local Government Act of 1948 empowers the Local Authorities in England and Wales to spend sixteen-and-a-half million pounds a year on the arts. (With the new rating valuations this sum will increase). But it is assessed that only about a sixtieth of that sum is now being used. So there is no legal difficulty about further expenditure.

In systematic diffusion there should be no reckless lavishness, but there is a strong case for planned and provident spending and the Arts Trusts, if they are created, could be vigilant as well as vigorous in development. All the arts would be their concern and the theatre lovers would have to see that they are given due consideration. In any case, with or without the Trusts, they must be resolute to press their claims. The art galleries, museums and libraries are there, whereas in many towns the theatres have been allowed to moulder or to vanish. The lead given by those towns which already have a constructive theatre policy must be followed by those who have let things slide. The coming of the National Theatre in London is not only benefit to the capital; it is a challenge to the nation at large to provide and sustain theatres of its own.

PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

WE had all been waiting, some of us with ill-concealed expectations of failure, for John Osborne's next play. And when *Luther* arrived at the Royal Court Theatre, via Paris, it proved to be by far the biggest thing this young dramatist has done, powerful, tortured—and disillusioned. Technically it owes something to the Brecht of *Galileo*; in its relative detachment too it follows the example of the German. But as usual in a first-rate dramatist this detachment is more apparent than real; and whereas behind Brecht the dramatist there stood a sentimental humanitarian—Mother Courage is a character as souplily conceived as the Stranger in *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*—Osborne begins to show signs of an altogether more searching nonconformity.

His Luther is a complex character—though even so, of course, not as complex as the real man. Osborne tries to simplify him by relying heavily on a Freudian interpretation of his state of mind; but in the event this offers little but an intermittent insistence on belching and bowels. The real interest of the play lies in its exploration of Luther's pride: his rebellion against his own father; his effort at self-mortification as a monk, and his further rebellion against his father in God, the Pope; his externalizing of his personal struggle in an attack on the abuses of the Church, his dismay when this leaves him with a political revolt on his hands—so that he turns on the simple men who supposed that they were supporting him; and his subsidence, after bringing about events which reshaped the whole of history, into a domestic celebrity in which he was still haunted by doubts as to whether he had been right—doubts even about the whole fabric of his belief.

His spiritual progress is embodied in a series of immensely powerful scenes. First, he takes his vows, in a shadowy church, beneath a crucifix hanging like a vast emblem of defeated anguish (the admirable sets are by Jocelyn Herbert); and here, although Luther hardly speaks, Albert Finney already suggests in his stiff-jointed silence that all is not well with his submission. While he is still struggling with his own failure to come to terms with religious obedience, his father roundly accuses him of escaping from the world into the Church. Bill Owen gives this coarse-grained, disappointed man a rasping power which offsets Mr. Finney's burly uncertainty; and when the second act opens, fifteen years later, George Devine as a wise and gentle old priest offers this Luther—by now famous as a scholar and preacher—another picture of himself, as a man who is attacking the Church for the satisfaction of his own soul. Then, when the Pope sends a Cardinal to put Luther in his place, comes perhaps the finest scene in the play. John Moffat's Cardinal seems at first only another exquisitely clever man of the world; but as he wrestles with Luther's obstinacy he too is seen as a man of real feeling. This is no dummy put up by Mr. Osborne for his hero to knock down, but a man who believes as passionately as Shakespeare did in the proper ordering of society. Mr. Moffat gradually sheds the blandness of the prelate, Mr. Finney gradually sheds the mulish confidence of the conscious rebel—yet in the end he cannot yield, only collapse. Out of this duel the two actors make a superb duet. Next Luther is confronted with the reproaches of one of the men who have fought, or so he supposed, for the right, and been abandoned; Julian Glover opposes a



ERIC PORTER as Becket and CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER as King Henry in 'Becket' by Anouilh at the Aldwych Theatre. Photograph by David Sim.

gaunt contempt to Luther's blustering paraphrase of 'Render unto Caesar . . .' And as the final curtain falls Luther is left with the memory of his own rebellions in his heart and his infant son in his arms. Mr. Finney's hunched anxiety speaks volumes.

Tony Richardson has produced with a welcome absence of fuss. I do not understand those who find no real dramatic development in the play. Its short scenes build an arch of passionate belief constantly threatened by an earthquake of uncertainty. The language is almost always the equal of its theme; and Luther, unlike George Dillon, Jimmy Porter and Archie Rice, never makes a frontal assault on the audience's emotions, never sits up and begs for sympathy—and never for a second loses our respect.

A rebel, in Mr. Osborne's phrase, is one who wants to stop obeying rules and start making them; a revolutionary is one who puts the cause before his own part in it. And here precisely lies

the difference between Mr. Osborne's Luther and M. Anouilh's Becket. And there is a further difference: Luther, whatever his doubts about the scheme of things in general, never, after his initial efforts to subdue himself as a monk, really doubts himself. M. Anouilh's Archbishop, on the other hand, despises himself, champions the Church against his friend and hero-worshipper Henry II as a means of personal redemption. In Peter Hall's production of *Becket* at the Aldwych Eric Porter finely underlined the paradox by which this man, the transmitter of civilized and humane values, could not love or bear to be loved, and was driven ultimately by indifference, the fruit of self-contempt. As Mr. Porter joined in the young King's buffooneries he conveyed with a rising inflection here and a twist of the head there a stabbing disgust with himself and everything about him—which warmed into something richer only when he met the King again, long after they had

quarrelled and could only look at each other across an abyss of misunderstanding. To this scene in particular Christopher Plummer too brought a baffled pain to deepen his petulant authority, and the result was another fine acting duet.

I am aware that in thus implicitly praising a play by M. Anouilh I am putting myself beyond the pale of cultured persons. Nevertheless I think *Becket* a fine work; I cannot share the delicious English puritanism which feels uneasily that since M. Anouilh is so obviously an immensely dexterous theatrical craftsman he cannot be serious, or that because he so gleefully and even vulgarly mixes up horseplay and heroics he cannot be sincere. I must however protest that the translation used at the Aldwych, for this play as for *Ondine*, is unworthy—lame, stilted and clumsy, even though literally accurate. And Leslie Hurry's designs, acceptable in themselves, involve a great deal of scene-shifting, carried out not behind the curtain or in full view but in an uncomfortable half-light. The play however survives; excellently acted all round, it enables Mr. Porter and Mr. Plummer to evolve a fine study in one of M. Anouilh's favourite themes: the ever-widening gap between a warped idealist and a spirited simpleton as expressed in the failure of a masculine friendship.

Mr. Osborne makes Luther a lifelong hypochondriac, which he was not. M. Anouilh makes Becket a Saxon (hating himself for collaborating with the Normans) which he was not; and Henry II an unlettered boor, which he was not. Do these liberties with history matter? Brecht would answer No. And I think I agree with him. Both Mr. Osborne and M. Anouilh seem to me to illustrate a larger truth by way of the liberties they take with history; and Shakespeare doubtless would have made the same claim. Saul Levitt, author of *The Andersonville Trial*, produced by Bernard Miles at the Mermaid, has perhaps distorted his principal

characters less, but then he illuminates no very striking truth, though he restates a perennial question: Can a man plead, in extenuation of dreadful behaviour, that he was merely carrying out orders? Andersonville was a prisoner-of-war camp in the American Civil War. One Wirz, was one of its officers; and after the war became a focus of hatred for half the United States. He was tried and sentenced (the President of the Court being General Wallace, author of *Ben Hur*). Out of this situation Mr. Levitt has made a play obviously relevant to our own day. His Wirz is a feeble creature, with just enough spirit to have been unimaginatively cruel, and to defend himself with no sense of what is possible without shame. The drama of the play, apart from what inevitably arises from a good court scene, came from the spectacle of the prosecuting counsel, himself a serving officer, urging that Wirz should have disobeyed his orders. Maurice Denham as Wirz flung off a strong ferret hysteria, and William Sylvester as the Prosecutor admirably exposed the grouping of his military mind towards its awkwardly unmilitary conclusion.

This production too marked a very noticeable improvement in the general standard of performance at the Mermaid. The open stage, however, proved a handicap. Bare brick down the sides of the theatre is one thing, and may strike a note of homespun endeavour. Bare brick all round the back of the stage is quite another, and merely serves to confuse the acoustics, so that it is not easy to distinguish what is being said. This objection applied with even greater force to Sean O'Casey's *The Bishop's Bonfire*—yet another play we are grateful for the chance of seeing; but our gratitude would be redoubled if we could hear as well. As it was, a ham-fisted production in which too many of the cast were encouraged to bellow, threw away half O'Casey's high jinks in mere noise. The play carries to extremes the old genius's fondness for



'THE BISHOP'S BONFIRE' by Sean O'Casey at the Mermaid Theatre. Joe Lynch, Terry Scully, Godfrey Quigley and Davy Kaye. Photograph by Morris Newcombe.

not so much blending the terrible and the absurd as injecting the poetically farcical with sudden tragedy. In this case the final scene makes emotional demands which we have not been prepared for and therefore cannot meet. But before that we have been treated in this, yet another of O'Casey's broadsides against the Roman Catholic Church, to some splendid knockabout nonsense—at its best when it pursues a line currently popular everywhere, though O'Casey was adept at it forty years ago: the inconsequent maundering of ignorant men out of their depth. The lunatic discussion in this play of the possibilities of a Russian invasion of Ireland, and a railway porter's distraught irruption into the gombeen man's drawing-room, are high peaks of this art. Several of the cast were in fact Irish, but I cannot say that they shone. Harry Hutchinson as the porter made himself clear, it is true, but what were those uneasy posturings? Godfrey Quigley, on the other hand, achieved both bulk and balance, and Davy Kaye,

an ex-music-hall comedian, in the grateful part of the little Codger, managed to hold the house with laughter and pathos as his tiny figure, all boots and beard, rolled round the stage.

What can I say of Jean Genet? Existentialist saint he may be, master of a flashing phrase he certainly is (and well translated by Bernard Frechtman); but a dreadful portentousness weighs him down as he doggedly sets about glorifying perversity of one kind and another. An early piece, *Death Watch*, given a single performance at the Arts Theatre, gave us two men and a girl shut up in a cell—a reworking, in a sense, of Sartre's *Huis Clos*. At the Royal Court *The Blacks* offered in an extremely complex theatrical framework some comments on white and black mentalities playing on each other. Written for a Negro cast, some of whom wore grotesque white masks, it seemed to me curiously patronizing. But it is perhaps not fair to judge the play on the strength of this performance. Produced by Roger Blin (who directed the

original in Paris), few of the Negro cast were intelligible, though all the women were beautiful.

Even so, it was possible to be sure that this was not the real thing; an impression reinforced when an Irish production of that modern masterpiece *Waiting for Godot* came to the Theatre Royal, Stratford. Alan Simpson's direction, we were told in advance, would stress the farcical elements of the piece; but as so often with statements of intention, this came to nothing. We were offered a good straightforward version of the play, given a slightly worrying twist by the Irish intonations, which in the event seemed surprisingly out of place. But once again the play in all its poetry beautifully survived. David Kelly's needling Vladimir certainly cut away some of the immense charity which Paul Daneman gave the part—which indeed Samuel Beckett has given it, but of which he disapproves. Yet the effect is of impoverishment.

A long way behind Osborne and O'Casey, the rest of our home-turned drama consisted largely of small things writ large. Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen*, having been given a Sunday night performance years ago, at last reached the Royal Court. In John Dexter's production the long crescendo of activity in the nether regions of the big restaurant became the centrepiece of the play. Some thirty people were kept continually on the move in a constantly accelerating ballet of confusion. Possibly the climax came a few minutes too early, leaving us exhausted when we should have been merely aghast; but as a feat of stage organization this was immensely striking. Mr. Wesker's philosophizing ('All the world's a kitchen') however, sounded hollow.

Another revenant from the underworld of the Sunday night performance, Alun Owen's *Progress to the Park*, having already suffered a sea-change at the hands of Theatre Workshop, was taken up once more and restaged in the enormous Saville Theatre by a television producer, William Kotcheff. As

might have been expected, this curious combination of opposites was not altogether a success. All the same there is something endearing about this generous tale of bigotry in a Liverpool slum, where Protestants and Catholics are at each other's throats. Billie Whitelaw's Mag Keegan was a gravely beautiful study of one of those good girls who confuse warmth of heart with quickness of desire.

Altogether unpretentious, *Celebration* (Duchess Theatre) caught its early audiences on the wrong foot, because its authors, Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse, have acquired with *Billy Liar* a reputation for a significance in terms of the contemporary which they have not earned and doubtless would not claim. Their new offering, two playlets, really, concerning one family before a wedding and after a funeral, deploys the humours of lower-middle-class life with affection. It was brought to London by the Nottingham Playhouse, whose company gave it admirable teamwork.

Two distinctly off-beat American plays reached outposts of the London theatre. *They Might be Giants* proved to be Joan Littlewood's last production at the Theatre Royal, Stratford. A fantastic morality by James Goldman about a man who thought he was Sherlock Holmes, it was given the full Littlewood treatment and sank under the strain. At the Lyric, Hammersmith, Arthur Kopit's *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad*, though also destroyed by its production, was more concerned with fantastic immorality. This whimsically titled piece proved to be an even more whimsical Freudian mishmash of, among others, Firbank, Strindberg and Ionesco. The fragments were manipulated with occasional dexterity in the writing and with a startling absence of any such quality in the performance. Leading the revels was the American actress, Stella Adler, well known as having once contradicted Stanislavsky and having acquired a considerable



'THE KITCHEN' by Arnold Wesker at the Royal Court Theatre. Robert Stephens, Mary Peach and Wolf Parr. Photograph by Edmark, Oxford.

reputation as a teacher in New York. It seems that her manner of action was intentionally disconnected, jerky and hesitant; but it is not easy to see what the purpose of such a display can be, and the effect is just as distressing as if it were an accident.

Our tale is almost told. William Douglas Home came back into the arena with *The Bad Soldier Smith* (Westminster), a play no doubt sincerely felt and indeed based on his own experiences, during the war, when he refused (unlike Eichmann or Captain Wirz at Andersonville) what he regarded as unnecessarily inhuman orders. But, despite some realistic Service dialogue, his play was strained and wooden, full of stock characters and reactions. The perils of expanding a fine supporting performance into a leading role were illustrated yet again by *Goodnight Mrs. Puffin* at the Strand Theatre, starring the delicious Irene Handl, a proper bundle of a woman, in her stage presence aggressively lower-class, alter-

nately amiable and threatening, but always full of desperate vitality. But can the speciality-player ever be asked to carry even a good play?

Quite different perils were exposed by Peter Mayne's *The Bird of Time* (Savoy). Mr. Mayne writes excellent and highly sophisticated travel books; his first steps on to the stage have led to a horrible fall. *The Bird of Time* is set in Kashmir—a Kashmir in which the British are now merely tolerated, and may not much longer be even that. A retired British administrator might seem a Blimp but isn't; his wife, however (Gladys Cooper), despises with a certain lunatic gallantry everything to do with the new India—but most of all she loathes the Indian woman on the next houseboat (Diana Wynyard), to whom long ago she lost a lover. Throw in a pawkily wise Indian and a gawkily sincere young Englishman (mysterious equipped in this production with a marked antipodean accent) and it will be seen that there are certain

dangers here. Not one of them is avoided. Mr. Mayne's sophistication has deserted him and left behind a morass of unconscious humour. Not easily shall I forget Gladys Cooper shaking Diana Wynyard by the shoulders and exclaiming 'Look at your eyes, all shagged with hashish!'

Classics have been few. From the Oxford Playhouse to the Strand, a production of *Hamlet* in which Frank Hauser's direction was ingenious without being exciting, and Jeremy Brett's Prince, wearing a kind of inbuilt immaturity, seemed a fit son for Helen Cherry's cool and shallow Gertrude. At the Old Vic *The Merchant of Venice* provided in Robert Harris a Shylock at once scornful and fastidious and in Barbara Leigh-Hunt a tall yet perky Portia. But whenever we feel inclined to disparage these as it were run-of-the-mill productions of Shakespeare we should pause. And I at least shall recall as a corrective the performances of a Greek company which offered a short season, at the Scala, of their own classics in modern Greek, and aimed to link

past and present in its style of performance. So poor were the production and acting that one realized in a flash that we are ever ungrateful—that, for example, the most modest of our repertory companies could and habitually does excel this group, which was, after all, thought fit to travel abroad as an emissary of Greek culture. No girls' school would have dared to mount so absurd a representation of the *Eumenides*. They spoke well in chorus, it is true, using only contralto voices; but in their writhings they were to a woman so many Joyce Grenfells at her most grotesque. And none of the principals generated enough power to illuminate more than a pale ghost of a character—except, to be fair, a certain M. Taxarchus, whose Aegisthus mopped and mowed with all the enthusiasm of a villain in an Adelphi melodrama.

We must never rest on our laurels; but we may now and again count our blessings. And among them is an overall standard of performance which we should not fail to honour even as we ask for more and more.

PROSCENIUM FORESTAGE AND O

By W. BRIDGES-ADAMS

ALL of a sudden, it seems that the National Theatre is upon us. A dream to Matthew Arnold and to Irving (who in the meantime provided a substitute that the plain man cheerfully accepted), it became positively a plan, almost too precise a plan to be perfectly convincing, in the hands of William Archer and Granville-Barker. Now it is to become a bricks-and-mortar reality; time-hallowed theory confronts the challenge of contemporary fact. Certain facts must indeed be faced. Not for many years can this institution be a *Comédie française*, nor

will it perpetuate as that theatre does the resolve of a single playwright-actor-manager who was backed by his king. We missed that chance because neither Elizabeth I nor Charles II had the wherewithal to set the precedent of royal subvention. It will inherit no tradition; its rafters will not have echoed the contending cries of Classics and Romantics; it will contain no dressing-rooms sacred to the memory of a Kemble or a Kean. Altogether new, it will be pledged to rediscover such standards as we have lost; cherishing those standards it must none

the less give proof that it is alive and progressive in a wildly changing world. And not the least of its problems is what sort of theatre, structural, ought it to be?

Are any of us sure on this point?—and if we are sure, are we right? Is this a propitious moment at which to register, irrevocably, our notion of the sort of theatre it ought to be? One age excels in one sphere, another in another. The nineteenth century built lovely ships and hideous dwellings; the twentieth builds lovely aircraft and hideous ships. The nineteenth achieved certain playhouses which were in my view the culmination of a steady progress initiated although not foreseen by the elder Burbage. The twentieth has distinguished itself by pulling a number of them down, for gain; the St. James's has gone, and Her Majesty's may now be under consideration by men who have calculated that office blocks earn more than theatres can. Some survivors of the original Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee must often have wished that the terms of their trust had permitted them to close with Tree's offer—there are grounds for believing that story—of His (Her) Majesty's as a going concern. They might have had, by now, funds enough to relieve them of any excessive dependence on the Treasury or the L.C.C., and a theatre with some sixty years of history behind it, by no means perfect for their purpose, but immune to the assault of the pressure groups simply because it was *there*. For as long as your National Theatre is still on the drawing-board the pressure groups can be as formidable as they were when we were rebuilding at Stratford. Then, the most vocal of them succeeded in imposing on us, while the Director was in America with his company, a ferro-concrete forestage which eventually had to be demolished at enormous expense. The object of these remarks is to suggest that in this time of flux, when heresy and sound doctrine are inextricably

confused, the National Theatre should commit itself, in terms of ferro-concrete, as little as it can.

The Battle of the Stages is nothing new. True, a young actor in (say) 1910 could learn his business without becoming aware of it. Melodrama could still teach him to utter the tritest sentiment with such conviction that the gallery cut in with a cheer before the end of the line; in a tour with Fred Terry or Lewis Waller he could acquire a touch of the *panache* that will always hold a house; after a year of Shakespeare with Benson's young athletes the classics held no terrors for him, for he could at least spout great verse. If thereafter he had the luck to be engaged by Sir George Alexander he would discover that all he had learned, with a West-end polish on it, was exactly what the St. James's wanted; he might even be taught by Sir Arthur Pinero himself how to make four dull words significant and beautiful. If, being young, he found himself oppressed by the set perfectionism of the St. James's, there was Repertory. On terms that Equity would not approve today he could have his fill of Shaw, Masefield, Galsworthy and the drabber realists of the Manchester school. In all these adventures he was learning how to project dramatic illusion from within the frame of the proscenium, and as a rule he asked for nothing better.

Some of us, however, did not accept that rule, any more than we agreed with Goethe that genius best fulfils itself in limitation. Away, we said, with any limitation whatsoever; was there not at least one among the Post-impressionists in the current exhibition who had defiantly painted a fat, pink foot right out over the frame that sought to contain his work? The Elizabethan Stage Society founded itself on a pious belief that Shakespeare should never be given with the scenic embellishment which (for all we really know) may have adorned some of his later plays; but its most momentous

discovery was of the freedom of the apron stage. That freedom we at once embraced. It did not matter whether we cared greatly for Shakespeare or whether we were secretly troubled by our inability to thrust our young voices and personalities effectively across the footlights; the apron stage—in fact any unusual kind of stage—symbolized our revolt from the constraint of the proscenium. The Irvings, Wyndhams and Alexanders might be more finished actors than we were; we could at least demonstrate that their methods were wrong; that their conception of true theatre was wrong, even though the public was so undiscerning as to share it.

The first decade of this century was almost as indulgent of heterodoxy as the sixth. If we did not mind taking chances and living hard, we could enjoy such a variety of experience that the theatre we now know can hardly offer us any surprises. My own orthodox apprenticeship taught me the rules. But I owed no less to the unorthodox apprenticeship which taught me how and when, if you knew them, you could break them, or rather take liberties with them, for the fundamental rules of our art are unchanging. It was Nugent Monck who first made me free of the medieval stage, according to his notions, and passed me on to the Elizabethan, according to William Poel's. Monck, being spiritually in descent from the mimes whom the Early Fathers outlawed (he was himself a correct but sardonic Anglican) could act anywhere, almost literally singing for his supper; moreover he could act with his shoulder-blades, like the Lunts: it was from him that I learned all I know of what is now called acting in the round. At Blickling I had to play not across footlights but across a sheet of water, whereon it was part of my duty to manoeuvre ceremonial barges of my own design. There were pageants, too, in those days; with Reinhardt's *Miracle* as an inspiration it was great fun to bring some scores of

Norman knights at full gallop over the brow of a hill. When, much later but still following in that master's steps, I had to send four hundred Thebans pelting down the aisle of Covent Garden, I was merely reproducing something we had seen in 1912.

I venture on these reminiscences only because they seem to have some bearing on the problem now facing the National Theatre: what sort of stage, what sort of auditorium? And I am compelled to say that all my early deviations from the norm left me with the conviction that the horseshoe house and the picture stage were, as a norm, the best. No true Elizabethan dares challenge the horseshoe which the Globe derived from the inn-yard as the easiest way of bringing the largest possible audience into the closest possible proximity to the stage, and Dr. Merchant has convinced us that Shakespeare's pictorial sense was strong, and that his theatre may well have exhibited the full splendour of baroque. Can we blame D'Avenant if he carried matters further? Loving true drama not a whit less than the masque in which he excelled, he conceived within twenty years of Shakespeare's death a scenic stage that would please by what it suggested, heightening the sense of actuality without any positive illusion, save in its own special domain of shipwrecks, conflagrations and the like: in short the 'play with scenes' which on the accession of Charles II quickly became the mode. D'Avenant's first playhouse in Lincoln's Inn Fields must have been very like a scenic Blackfriars. In the eighteenth century the Restoration forestage of Drury Lane, on which the acting was done, was reduced by manager Rich so that he might cram more benches into his pit; Cibber, as we know, never forgave him, but this curtailment does not seem to have troubled Garrick or Sheridan. In Wyatt's Drury Lane as Macready knew it the forestage was no more than an apron, used as such; when Duse played there in the nineties it had become a

mere vestige of itself and she accomplished her delicate masterstrokes behind the curtain-line. But as early as the eighties Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft had spoken the logical last word. The proscenium of their Haymarket was an all-round frame for their most recognizable picture of real life. The footlights rose into place as the act-drop went up, and the frame was held in the ample curve of the tiers; the illusion, we are told, was complete. This was indeed the perfect stage for those who wrote for it, and there are some revered names among them; it was the rebels of my youth who protested that it might be right for Ibsen, Pinero, Wilde, Strindberg and Shaw, but was wrong for the old drama, and might prove to be wrong for the new.

During my earlier Stratford years we were often commiserated with in certain circles because the old Memorial Theatre had no apron stage worthy of the name. This was no bother to us, for we could make as much of a forestage as we wanted by erecting an inner proscenium. But the purists insisted that this was not the true thing. It was of the essence of dramatic illusion that our Hamlet should have his audience on three sides of him at least; our forestage must jut out into the stalls. As to this contention I am still in doubt. For example you, sitting on Hamlet's left, are entranced by his To be or not to be, when for a moment you allow your gaze to wander from his noble face to his no less noble legs. Suddenly you find yourself looking between them into the eyes of my respected Editor, who is sitting on Hamlet's right. If you have the privilege of Mr. Ivor Brown's acquaintance, what is the drill? Do you give the nod—or smile—of recognition? Obviously you cannot wave your programme and say Hullo. But even if the eyes you encounter, framed in those noble legs, are those of a complete stranger, is your illusion heightened by an arrangement that gives you no more than an uncertain half-share in Hamlet's face? Were our

eighteenth and nineteenth century Hamlets conceivably progressing, not backsliding, when they began to cultivate a picture-sense? Was the audience at the Globe conceivably a trifle scatter-brained? Have we, in all our strenuous fumblings for the ideal, surpassed our recent forbears in the art of directing an audience's heart and mind as we would wish? Does it help in that direction if on entering the theatre we find half a scene already set in front of the act-drop whose purpose once was to excite our anticipation?—or if, during the interval, a number of graceless louts stroll on and take the thing away? In Wycherley's time they may have put up with this: need we? The old arena at Earl's Court had a nearly semi-circular act-drop which hid all such unseemliness. It is perhaps the Nemesis of nineteenth-century realism that we are left striving to create illusion while proclaiming the art of illusion a sinful thing; theologians might detect here the mental processes of a Puritanism which, safely established, is now intent on sobering-down the rosy god to whom the theatre owes its being.

Mr. Bernard Miles is no Puritan; he can be unashamedly and delightfully Dionysian, even on his platform stage. Using that same stage he has forced on us a sense of actuality as to time and place in the American Civil War that no film of that episode has yet achieved, compelling us to play a spectator's part in the sombre trial at Andersonville. Almost persuaded, I have to remind myself that Granville-Barker did exactly this with Galsworthy's *Justice* in the twenty-six feet that the proscenium of the Duke of York's afforded him; that I should not care to see *Rosmersholm* on the vehemently unclaustrophobic stage of the Mermaid, or even *The Importance of Being Earnest* or *His House in Order*; that the opening and rising of the Savoy curtain on *The Gondoliers* was a marvel that confirmed my faith in theatre magic once for all. Let me acknowledge a stupendous

Otello which is now to be seen and heard in East Berlin. The producer could hardly smother Verdi's orchestra under a forestage, but he threw over it one quarter of a forestage, on the audience's right. I was lucky in a ring-side seat; I could have touched Desdemona as she lay dead. But I also had to observe that she was still breathing heavily after her exertions. And had not there been a faint whiff of moth-ball when the tumultuous Cypriots came charging down this bridge that had been so cunningly devised to carry illusion across the curtain-line? Here was all the illusion, and disillusion, that extreme intimacy can give. Moreover, since the principal singers were clearly masters of the old technique whereby the eye anticipates the gesture and the gesture the word, it was possible to wonder whether they had any real need of this bridge at all; whether in fact any soul in the audience felt that need, if he was sitting in those remoter seats which the critics and (as I fear) some producers do not frequent.

Certainly it can be desirable to throw the action forward into the house. Tree, at the height of his supremacy, was sensitive to the winds of change. I watched him once while William Poel (at his invitation and expense—but he wanted his Shakespeare festivals to be fully representative) was building a forestage out over the stalls of His Majesty's and placing his arc-lamps in the upper circle; this arrangement did not upset the box-office because, sad to relate, very few of Tree's public wished to see *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* done in the Elizabethan manner. But when, not long after, Tree staged *Henry VIII* it was apparent that he had imbibed Poel's sense while rejecting his aberrations. There was an unmistakable forestage, but it was curved in conformity with the sight-lines of the theatre and lit, imperceptibly, from the auditorium roof. The action was thrown forward, the scenic setting gained in depth, the act-drop lost nothing of its potency.

I have left myself little space for the

O, the arena stage which, according to Dr. Leslie Hotson, will one day reveal undreamt-of splendours in Shakespeare's art. It can be excellent for crowd effects, as Reinhardt knew; it would do very well for the storming of the Bastille or the rape of the Sabine women. But it is less effective when the action narrows down to the clash of individual character, as of Benedick and Beatrice, Rosalind and Orlando; for it is an ineluctable truth that the back of an actor's head is seldom as exciting as his face. Dr. Hotson's bombshell may go down to history as an example of the explosion which occurs when powerful scholarship comes in contact with a powerful, but hitherto suppressed, imagination. If he has made any converts, *Credo quia impossible* is all that they can say.

We are promised two theatres under one roof. But even in one, given a modicum of compromise, the National Theatre should have little difficulty in conforming to the essential requirements of Burbage at the Globe, of D'Avenant at Dorset Garden, of Cibber and Garrick at Drury Lane, of Irving at the Lyceum, of Alexander at the St. James's, of Tree at His Majesty's, of Poel, of Granville-Barker, of Sir Tyrone Guthrie at Stratford, Ontario; even of Mr. Hall at Stratford (Eng.) and Mr. Miles at the Mermaid. It is, after all, only a matter of easy sight-lines (which the area permits) and of an auditory that holds the stage in its embrace. Let the promoters of the National Theatre bear this in mind. There is no longer an Elizabethan pressure-group to plague them by insisting on the kind of stage for which Shakespeare may have written. But it would be lamentable if, in years to come, they were plagued by Victorian and Edwardian Societies who cursed them up and down the land because they would not, indeed could not, play Robertson, Ibsen, Wilde, Shaw, Galsworthy, Maugham and Lonsdale on the kind of stage for which they wrote: picture-frame, foot-lights and all.

A TRIP TO SWEDEN

By CLIFFORD WILLIAMS

THIS is an account of an extremely brief visit to Sweden, so brief that I must try to confine myself to reportage of performances, productions and conversations, and avoid drawing conclusions as to the general state of the Swedish theatre.

Malmö. Home of the Stadsteater, probably the most discussed of the Swedish theatres. It was opened in 1944 and comprises a main theatre which seats from 553 to 1,695—false walls glide on rails in the ceiling—and a small theatre seating 204. About 350 people are employed by the Stadsteater, including 60 actors and principal singers, 23 dancers and a chorus of 34.

Malmö has a population of 230,000, but about 50 per cent of the audience come from outside the city. During the year 400,000 tickets are sold. The Stadsteater receives an annual subsidy of £140,000—£120,000 from the State and the remainder from the city. In return it stages 18 productions each year. This year's offerings include *Georges Dandin*, *The Bartered Bride*, *My Fair Lady*, *Maria Stuart*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Fabbri's Trial of Jesus*, *The Flying Drum* (a play for children by Lennart Hellsing), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Sagan's Chateau in Sweden*. It runs a theatre school—a three-year course for 15 students, and intends opening a ballet school next year. There is a full association with the 60-strong Malmö Symphony Orchestra.

Two rehearsal rooms were added to the building in 1955. One measures 70 by 40 feet, the other 50 by 40 feet. The revolving stage of the main theatre is 66 feet in diameter with generous playing area all round it and an apron in front (if needed).

The director, Gösta Folke, has an assistant who also runs the school, two

or three guest directors each season, an opera and a musical director. The latter has two assistants.

Stockholm. The Royal Dramatic Theatre has the usual two stages, and is directed by Karl Ragnar Gierow with Stig Torsslöw as his second-in-command and headmaster of the drama school. His staff also includes Olof Molander, Ingmar Bergman and Alf Sjöberg.

Torsslöw's production of Ostrovsky's *Wolves and Sheep* was as good an introduction as any to the ensemble playing of the company. In the presence of such ensemble one's immediate response is to the solidity of the performance. Everything fits—presenting a totally integrated appearance. But the inner harmony has been established too, so that the play continues—as it were—after the curtain has fallen, just as it has obviously been going on for a long time before curtain rise. Acting in depth. The Swedish theatre began with imported French troupes, but the hand of the Russian master has also been felt. A brilliantly comic performance by Gertrud Fridh as Evlampija Kupavina.

Another glittering performance came from Inga Tidblad in the title-role of Strindberg's *Christina*, a play equally distinguished by the costumes and scenery of Marik Vos, who also designed Bergman's production of *The Seagull*. In common with most of Stockholm I was disappointed by *The Seagull*. Perhaps the penalty of ensemble may be over-relaxation. At any rate, not even the presence of Eva Dahlbeck as Irina Trepleva could bring the performance I saw to life.

The Dramatic Theatre has only recently reverted to true repertory, and it was interesting to learn that the actors were not entirely happy with the situation. Even a superb actor like Ulf

Palme had his moments of indecision as Trigorin on one night in the big theatre, and Morell (to Dahlbeck's *Candida*) on the next in the small theatre. The younger actors have another (and not uncommon) grouse about institutional theatre—that pensions, seniority, sheer size of company delay the rise to bigger and better parts. They wanted to know about Finney and O'Toole!

I failed to see Max von Sydow in *Altona*, but I caught a glimpse of his towering figure during rehearsals for Sjöberg's production of *King John*. I think it was then in its fourth week with several more to go, and the air was fairly supercharged. No wonder Sjöberg was surprised when I asked him whether he was satisfied with only two or three productions a year!

The Royal Dramatic Theatre is the repository of theatre tradition in Sweden (leaving aside opera and ballet), and it suffers to some extent from a lack of indigenous dramatists. Since Strindberg only Pär Lagerkvist and Hjalmar Bergman have become widely known. This is a problem which for the moment affects the Dramatic Theatre less than the network of Civic Theatres thrown over Sweden. The oldest of these—at Helsingborg—came into being about 40 years ago, Göteborg opened in 1934, Norrköping/Linköping in 1947, Uppsala in 1951. All are wrestling to build and maintain audiences, and they need, more acutely than the Dramatic Theatre, a contemporary Swedish drama to help them.

The difficulty is spotlit by the opening of the latest Civic Theatre, that of Stockholm (1960). After 30 years of discussion, it is now functioning on a provisional site, and is scheduled for full completion on a different site some time during the 1970's. Left-wing pressure for a theatre which would cater for the contemporary as opposed to the classic, for the rapidly increasing 'workers' population of Stockholm and environs rather than the middle class, has produced a multi-purpose audi-

torium seating 850.

The Civic Theatre's management has been severely criticized for not presenting the right plays. *Miss Julie* (with Ingrid Thulin), *Othello*, *The Cherry Orchard*—these are not the plays which were expected. Moreover, it is said, where is the ensemble? But Lars-Levi Laestadius, the director, has immense problems to overcome. He is starting on the ground floor and needs time to achieve ensemble. He is hampered by a clumsy theatre—too wide a stage and poor acoustics—and by the lack of a second stage (*The Caretaker* had to be given in a small private theatre in Stockholm for want of this). He must pay attention to the needs of the suburban potential audiences and yet keep the big theatre afloat. In any case, far too little prominence has been given to the suburban fit-up tours which he has already initiated and which bring artists like Thulin, Gunnar Lindblom and Anders Ek to the doorstep of the new audiences.

Uppsala. A small University town (75,000) whose Municipal Theatre takes each of its productions to the neighbouring town of Gavle (50,000). The bill of fare resembles that of a first-rate English repertory theatre—Anouilh and Gogol balanced with *The Four-Poster* and *You Can't Take it with You*. Its running costs, £88,500 per year, are double those of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, but the Government gives it £27,500 and the Municipalities give £8,200 plus rent-free theatres. Young actors at the theatre receive £65 per month, rise to £90 after five years and can expect between £100 and £150 from then on.

But, again, problems. A Saturday evening performance of Hjalmar Bergman's comedy about a Nobel prize winner, *Swedenhielms*, was given to a very small house. And a rough performance with a great deal of audience ogling and 'personality' acting—the first and only time I met it in Sweden.

Göteborg. Stora Teatern is a lyric theatre with 100 years behind it (hit of

the present season *The Most Happy Fella*). It was occupied by the Norwegian Opera so I hurried to the Municipal Theatre—two stages, technical staff of 60, administration of 20, 50 actors, 10 students, £93,000 from the State and £24,000 from the Municipality each year.

In each season 10,000 people buy *abonnement* (season tickets) and there are great reductions for party bookings. Nevertheless, in the 1940's there were some 20 groups exceeding 300 in number in regular attendance, and now there are only 2 or 3 of that size. But the theatre is fighting back strongly. It is the most cosmopolitan of the Swedish theatres, and has been susceptible to the influence of many foreign visitors—the Old Vic, Ballet Jooss, Piccolo Teatro di Milano, the *Comédie française* and Theatre Workshop. Its actress-director, Karin Kavli, and indefatigable Theatre Secretary Erikson, have created an exceptional feeling of youth in their theatre. They are aware that the *status quo* cannot be preserved in the face of new media and new demands, and they are responding with a vigour and a purpose comparable to that of Vilar's T.N.P.

Envoy. The theatre in Sweden is officially recognized as being important. It receives yearly about £1,250,000 from the Government alone—which, I believe, is rather more than all the arts receive in Britain. (The money is raised by lotteries so no one can grumble!) Such help bestows an enviable freedom to manoeuvre and develop. The spread of theatre has been particularly facilitated by the establishment of the Riksteater (1933) which provides performances in theatreless areas. 15 productions are on tour at one time between September and April (a touring Open Air Theatre takes over in the summer) and nearly 2,000 performances are given each year.

But the picture is not entirely rosy and, though the Swedish theatre movement is young, there are danger signals. A quarter-full house here, a thoroughly

bad performance there, sometimes a lack of managerial sprightliness or a tendency to keep audiences at arm's length.

Despite the strength of ensemble, the brilliance of individual artists, the excellent conditions of production, coupled with the sincere desire to reach out more widely and increase audiences there still remains—or so I thought—a curious indifference on the part of the theatre to the world about it. It is well-intentioned but insufficiently fervent. It has the air of a show-case, and dust has been known to settle.

In Stockholm exists the one truly experimental theatre which I came across—Arenateatern in Djurgården, run by a young radio producer Per Edström and his wife Berit Marianne. They met at Decroux's mime school in Paris. They were fascinated by the circus, trampolines, puppets, *Commedia dell'arte*, children, audience participation, new plays and theatre-in-the-round. Djurgården park is the pleasure ground of Stockholm, for centuries the home of fiddlers, acrobats, rope-dancers, puppeteers, liquor vendors, and has had a theatre offering farce, melodrama, vaudeville and opera since the 18th century. On this site, Per Edström has opened an arena theatre using the décor of an 1860's theatre (so that after Drottningholm Court Theatre this is the oldest theatrical décor in use in the Stockholm area).

Arenateatern superbly demolishes the idea that theatre-in-the-round must lack the magic of the proscenium theatre. It breathes the past, but it is dedicated to the future. As such it receives some lip-service but precious little support, especially from theatre artists themselves.

I cannot resist a single conclusion; that the Swedish theatre needs more enterprises of this calibre, possessing a similar total audience sympathy, concern for new dramatists and new forms, and lack of middle-age spread, if it is not to settle down into a comfortable, stolid and faintly dull existence.

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, 1961



Above: Christopher Plummer and Geraldine McEwan in *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Michael Langham. (Photograph: Gordon Goode). Opposite, top: Peter McEnery and Ian Bannen in *Hamlet*, directed by Peter Wood. (Photograph: Angus McBean). Below: Christopher Plummer and Dame Edith Evans in *Richard III*, directed by William Gaskill. (Photograph: Angus McBean).

The remaining plays in the 1961 season, which ends on December 2nd, are *As You Like It*, directed by Michael Elliott, with Vanessa Redgrave as Rosalind, Ian Bannen as Orlando and Max Adrian as Jaques; *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Peter Hall, with Brian Murray and Dorothy Tutin in the name parts, and *Othello* (opening October 10th) directed by Franco Zeffirelli, with John Gielgud as Othello and Dame Peggy Ashcroft as Emilia.





PITLOCHRY FESTIVAL, 1961

Above: Charmian Eyre in *The Slave of Truth* by Molière, adapted by Miles Malleson.
Below: James Wellman and William Moore in *Fifteen Strings of Money*, adapted from the Chinese
by Guenther Weisenborn and James Forsyth. Photographs by Norman Brown, Dundee.

ONE THEATRE

By WALTER LUCAS

A HEATWAVE in London with theatre technicians talking their heads off in Britain's nationally subsidized cinema, their subject adaptable playhouses. In-the-round, open or arena, much shrillness about the wicked old proscenium arch. That over-used word 'exciting' liberally scattered through the clever, sometimes too clever, speeches of the chubby geniuses leading the new Establishment. Inevitably a great deal of silliness with fanaticism becoming a bore. Then on the last morning some sobriety and reason followed by bursts of fun mixed with erudition from a delegate, expatriate and criminally middle-aged, and from him news of a great upsurge of theatre interest in India—a very large part of it sustained by amateurs.

Why India? one heard the question. The answer was easy. A nascent culture, freed from colonialism. Why amateur? Less easily. Well, I suppose (doubtfully) the theatre is a people's art.

During intervals in the high-powered discussion of that week, valuable and often absorbing as it was, I found myself thinking much of an experiment whose successful outcome I had seen some days before in Ipswich, one which surely must have achieved something of the Conference's presumable purpose, the contriving of means whereby the theatre can be made to mean more—and to more people. The manager, Alan Gray, and director, Geoffrey Edwards, of the Ipswich Theatre, a professional repertory, had combined the technical resources of their own company with the acting ability of local amateurs to produce, very well indeed, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. The collective standard of the acting was at least of sound repertory standard, and sometimes outstandingly good. The

servant Firs, for instance, while remaining perfectly within the framework of the production, seemed to realize aspects of the character that often remain obscure, the peasant pride, stubbornness and crankiness one is too often allowed to forget as the background of this character. In Ipswich my neighbour, an old age pensioner, was identifying himself with Firs in a way which would have appalled Brecht's noisier disciples but possibly delighted 'St. Bert' himself. The Ranevskaya too was fine, well able to stand comparison in my mind with Athene Seyler, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies and, dare I say it, Alla Tarasova herself. I do not know to what extent Mr. Edwards was responsible; certainly the utmost credit must be given to him for what was a beautiful piece of work. I like to think, though, that here was the result, as much as anything, of excellent teamwork by dedicated persons, both amateur and professional, true theatre persons in fact.

I know that such experiments have been made before. Indeed there are amateurs who regularly use professional talent (though most often on amateur terms) and one has heard with sadness of such noble ventures as the Leeds Civic Theatre, now no longer extant, where a richness of amateur talent was used to supplement a professional company. It does happen. But does it happen often enough? We are told that in the Soviet Union professional companies are obliged to have amateur counterparts under their protection. That might be considered as going rather too far. But surely there could be some way of avoiding the situation, complained of often in this country, where professional and amateur companies in the same area live often in a state of undeclared war, or more often and worse, in conscious ignorance of each

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other's existence. Where it does happen, both sides are usually to blame. The amateurs claim the professional to be uppish and the professionals say that the amateurs give them no support. The important thing is that nobody benefits. Professionals have complained that in areas where the amateur movement is strongest repertory companies find it hard to exist. I do not believe this always to be true. Where it is, it throws no credit whatever on local amateurs, who should have worked to ensure that such a situation could not be allowed to develop.

This is generalizing with a vengeance. There are amateur societies who are keenly aware of what the professional theatre and, as important, other amateur companies are doing. These, it goes without saying, are normally the better companies. Because they take the trouble to keep their minds open, their work is imaginative, skilful and, in range, often more daring than professional companies. I know of one group whose recent season of eight months included works by Molière, Beckett, Tennessee Williams, Shakespeare, Pinter, Feydeau, Anouilh and Brecht. This sounds rather like the repertoire of one of those foreign state-subsidized theatres so much beloved of visiting English critics. But the group is in Nottingham, is one of several in that city, pays its way and takes the keenest interest in the work of the professional company at the Nottingham Playhouse. This type of amateur group, of which there are many in Britain, has moved very far away from those which exist as a base for starring members, whose main anxiety is the date of release to amateurs of the latest West End one or two star vehicle. The former kind is more anxious about the availability of *The Devil's* or *A Man for all Seasons* than *The Amorous Prawn*.

In the past year, I have experienced much professional theatre in London, rather less in the provinces, amateur theatre in surroundings as dissimilar as the Coventry, Belgrade, suburban

church halls and the open air, finals performances in the Capital's dramatic academies, in-the-round both amateur and professional and last, and in 1961 I must say with regret least, festival performances. It would be ridiculous to claim that any amateur company achieves the standards of, for instance, the Stratford-Aldwych companies, but equally there is some non-professional theatre whose level of presentation is comparable at least with what I can only term Off-Shaftesbury Avenue or London, S.W.1. For many people, notable critics among them, *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance* only achieved its real impact in professional performances outside London or, more interestingly in this context, by amateur companies, notably one at the 1961 Students' Festival. Saroyan's *Cave Dwellers* in outer London was more highly thought of than the same play performed professionally in London, W.1, and Croydon. There are other examples.

I am never quite sure how one can equate the theory that Britain is not theatre-minded with the fact that Britain (with other English-speaking countries) has overwhelmingly more little theatres and amateur groups in proportion to population than any other European country. Germany has State, Municipal and County theatres scattered throughout its length but one can knock at least two '0's off the British total of approximately 30,000 in assessing its amateur theatre strength. And a very fair proportion of that British total devote their energies to plays of quality like the Nottingham group described above. Not by any means all, or even a large proportion, of their work is given over to farces, crime plays or drawing-room comedies. In the field of the one-act play, admittedly not normally practical for professional companies, amateur companies possibly have the edge. In the British Drama League Northern Area Final Festival out of six plays entered two were productions of the same Tennessee Williams one-act play in verse, *The*

Purification, one incidentally being of very high quality. Yet many professionals to whom I have described the performance did not know that such a play existed.

But I have concentrated on the exceptions, the purpose being to show that any co-operation of the two wings of the theatre would not be entirely one-sided. The fact must be squarely faced that much in the amateur theatre gives no cause for back-slapping. That arrogance born of the extraordinary assumption of some amateurs that because they do it for nothing or for the love of it they are more sincere and therefore better usually shows through in conceited performances. I now find myself instinctively mistrusting such persons rather in the way that I shy from those enthusiasts who in ordinary conversation use the word 'drama' in capital letters. Coupled with 'exciting' or 'excitement' it can be a fair indication of phoniness.

To return to the National Film Theatre discussion and its Indian amateurs playing such a major part in the resurgence of drama in that country, to Ipswich with its integrated *Cherry Orchard*, I ask, and I know many have asked before me—how to make these two strike the right sort of sparks from each other and each other's enthusiasm? Ipswich will forgive me I am sure for saying that it is not the only place where fine amateur actors are to be found. Is there no possibility of such projects being carried out in at least a proportion of the cities and towns which boast repertory companies? If the professionals are ready to consider such plans there must be amateurs ready to participate. There need be no question of loss of identity since such ventures could only be carried through at intervals. I know that a great deal of work is involved. The Ipswich plan took many months to come to fruition. It might mean that Mrs. X would not be given her chance to show Dame Flora how a part should have been played and Mr. X might resign from

the committee as a result. But think what a lot of brighter and more exciting (it had to happen) work such fusion of ideas might bring forth and how everybody, including that permanent invalid the British Theatre, could benefit.

One small corollary, not my own idea but that of Norman Marshall. It seems fairly clear that one of the amateur theatre's problems is the lack of good young producers. Of the number of about-to-be professionals turned out by the Dramatic Academies, Universities and other sources up to three times every year, there must be many

who would like to produce and among that number some who *could* produce. By working with amateur groups they would be gaining experience, albeit unpaid. I know of some amateurs who are keenly interested in obtaining the services of such young men and women. One must face the prospect of some disappointments, some failures, even a disaster or two. If Mesdames Thurburn and Bruford, Messrs. Fernald and MacOwan are overwhelmed with letters on this possibility by enthusiastic amateur companies, I shall not be a scrap repentant.

PLANNING ADAPTABLE THEATRES

By NORMAN MARSHALL

LAST June the International Association of Theatre Technicians held its third Biennial Congress at the National Film Theatre with the recently founded Association of British Theatre Technicians acting as hosts. At the end of the five days I came away feeling profoundly dispirited and I think that many of the other English theatre people present must have felt the same. That June was a glum month for the English Theatre. The Government had just announced their refusal to build a National Theatre; the new Royalty Theatre, the building of which the L.C.C. had made a condition when granting planning permission for an office block on the site of the Stoll Theatre, had been cynically leased to a film company; the Nottingham Town Council was threatening to cancel the plans for building its Civic Theatre and there was the news that three more provincial theatres were to be pulled down. The contrast with what is happening in other countries is humiliating. A delegate from India announced that the Indian Government, to celebrate the centenary of Rabindranath Tagore, was offering

grants to provincial governments willing to build theatres, with the result that fourteen are about to be built. A South African delegate spoke of five civic theatres which have recently been opened and two more which are in course of construction. Canada during the last year or two has built five magnificent theatres, a sixth will soon be opened and another is in the planning stage. A German delegate casually mentioned the fact that in his country there are one hundred theatres which are financed either by the Government or by the Municipalities.

Talking to many of the foreign delegates I found they were aghast at what is happening to the English theatre. Abroad it is generally admitted that the one art at which we have always excelled is the Drama, so it seems incomprehensible to foreign observers that with the full consent of the Government and Municipal Authorities we should be pulling down our theatres without building others to replace them. The question asked again and again was 'Are the theatres being demolished because there are no longer audiences for them?' The

answer, of course, is that while this may be true in some cases, many prosperous theatres have been pulled down because of sheer greed. Most theatres are on valuable sites in the centre of a town and many authorities gladly give permission for these sites to be 'developed' because of the increased income they will get from the rates. Or they genuinely believe that a supermarket or yet another towering office block will be a more valuable asset to the town than a theatre; and one has to admit the fact, which Mr. Peter Hall pointed out on the opening day of the Conference, that only three per cent of the population has ever been inside a theatre and a large proportion of that three per cent has only seen a pantomime or a variety show.

As one listened to the descriptions of new theatres in other countries and watched the photographs and plans thrown on the screen one was acutely conscious that even the three professional theatres we have built since the war are nothing to boast about. Although the Mermaid is original and ingenious in design it is in many ways unsatisfactory because it had to be fitted into an existing building. As for the Royalty and the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, there are so many elementary faults in their design and equipment that it was partly because of this that the Association of British Theatre Technicians was founded at the beginning of this year. A packed-out preliminary meeting proved there was a strong feeling among theatre people that something must be done to try to prevent similar blunders being perpetrated when any other new theatres are built. The several architects at the meeting strongly endorsed the urgent need for some central body to which architects could turn for technical information when designing a theatre. It was agreed that the word 'Theatre' should not be too narrowly interpreted as there is urgent need for the study of the problems involved in designing and equipping stages in schools, colleges

and assembly halls.

So, as a result of this meeting, the Association of British Theatre Technicians was founded, not, it must be emphasized, merely as an advisory body, but primarily as a forum in which theatre technicians can meet and exchange views and discuss their problems. It will, it is hoped, serve as a pool for information on theatre buildings, technical matters and new ideas. Sub-committees have been set up to deal with theatre architecture, lighting, the use of new materials, sound equipment, and fire regulations. At the International Congress it was plain that every country represented was troubled by the way out-of-date fire precautions are severely limiting the design of new unorthodox theatres. Needless to say, nobody denied that every precaution should be taken for the public's safety, but obviously all over the world there is a need for a more enlightened and flexible approach to the subject, taking into account the new materials now being used which vastly minimize the risk of fire.

The theme of the Congress was 'Planning Adaptable Theatres'. Although some extremely ingenious theatres of this kind were demonstrated one sensed on the whole a certain lack of enthusiasm for this kind of compromise theatre. Inevitably discussion centred on what is the most desirable form of theatre. The advocates of the open stage were there in full force but there were also plenty of speakers who defended the proscenium theatre. They were not dogmatic; they did not claim that the proscenium theatre is the only desirable form of theatre; they merely maintained that there are a considerable number of plays which can only be seen to the best advantage in this kind of theatre. The moderation of these speakers seemed to have a mellowing influence on the extremists on the other side. Sean Kenny even went so far as to allow that all the existing proscenium theatres need not be pulled down. But, somewhat illogically, he

insisted that no new ones must be built. If it is granted that the proscenium theatre still has its uses it is essential that we should have some genuinely modern proscenium theatres. As one speaker pointed out, no good proscenium theatre has been built in London since the early twenties. The several which have been built since then have auditoriums more suitable for a cinema than a theatre and the stages are much the same as those built in the last century, in spite of the fact that in other countries new types of proscenium theatres have been developed. Even the staunchest supporters of the proscenium theatre agreed that today no one form of theatre is suitable for all kinds of plays and productions, that there is an urgent need in this country for various kinds of open stage theatres.

What made this Conference particularly valuable was that there was very little theorizing. Instead there was a great deal of factual information about new theatres already in existence—given not just by their architects but also by people who have worked in these theatres. For instance, Peter Wood talked about his experiences when producing on the open stage at Stratford, Ontario, giving an exact account of the advantages and disadvantages which a producer encounters when working on this type of stage—which on the whole he found immensely stimulating. His one or two suggestions as to how the design and equipment of the theatre might be bettered provided valuable data for anyone designing a similar theatre. At another session, after a new American theatre of excitingly adventurous design had been enthusiastically described by its director, he was followed by a speaker who had seen a performance in this theatre as a member of the audience, and as a result was decidedly critical about certain features of the theatre.

A particularly valuable—and regrettably unusual—aspect of the Conference was the insistence on the importance of architects working in close collaboration

with lighting experts at an early stage instead of, as so often happens, calling them in after the plans are complete or even after the theatre has been built. There were papers by lighting engineers and lighting designers, and a demonstration showing the development of stage lighting, beginning with an old gas-lit stage-flood. Improvements in lighting equipment have been progressing so quietly and steadily through the years that I think many of us had not realized how far we have progressed even during the last ten years until at this demonstration we were able to compare the beam thrown by a stage lantern designed ten years ago with that of its present-day counterpart, infinitely more powerful and flexible, yet considerably smaller and more compact.

The Conference very completely fulfilled its primary purpose which was to bring together all kinds of theatre technicians—including producers, architects, lighting engineers, stage designers, lighting designers, production managers, stage managers, and acoustic consultants—so that they could obtain a fuller understanding of one another's problems. Seventeen countries were represented. Speakers were allowed to address the audience in English, French or German. Whenever the language spoken was unfamiliar there were head-phones through which one heard a simultaneous translation in one's own language. There were far fewer boring patches than at most conferences of this length, mainly because all papers were limited to a maximum of half an hour.

From a purely English point of view the Conference was important in proving that the very recently founded Association of British Theatre Technicians already had sufficient authority and facilities to organize an international conference on this scale. The A.B.T.T. is in no sense a trades union; nor is it a pressure group; it simply seeks to keep its members informed of the latest technical advances and new ideas in all

matters pertaining to the theatre, and give opportunities for discussing them. The information which is being pooled is available to anyone contemplating building a theatre of any sort or size,

professional or amateur. But perhaps one ought to add that it has no intention of usurping the place of professional theatre technicians by providing unlimited free advice.

GOING OUT TO A SHOW

By IVOR BROWN

IT has been calculated by the statisticians of the British theatre that only two per cent of the adult population are playgoers, even occasionally. John Counsell, of the Theatre Royal, Windsor, writing in his frank and sensible leading articles in his magazine-programme, *Curtain-up*, has stated that only five per cent of the two per cent are attracted by the kind of play that is experimental and what is called 'off-beat'. Obviously children must be excluded from these figures. If we reckon the adult population by the number of people entitled to the suffrage, we find that just under twenty-eight millions voted at the last General Election: allow for twenty-five per cent of absentees and abstentions, we have an adult and therefore potentially play-going population of thirty-five millions, of which the two per cent of actual playgoers is less than three-quarters of a million: five per cent of that gives us only thirty-five thousand people who will pay to see anything that is not routine entertainment. This they must do regularly if the figures are to make sense. Let us suppose some under-estimation. Norman Marshall in his article in this issue quotes Peter Hall's statement of three per cent as the play-going potential. So there may be seventy thousand possible patrons of the off-beat.

Some qualifications must be made. The number of those going to see Shakespeare, especially at Stratford-upon-Avon, probably includes many who like this kind of outing and would

not look at a Theatre Workshop or a Court Theatre play, however highly praised, if it came their way. But with all allowances made, the appeal of what may be called unusual theatre is very small and cannot be expected to sustain by its gate-money the providers of that kind of drama. The necessity of experimental plays to keep the theatre fresh and creative can hardly be questioned.

In Central London at the time of writing there are fifteen big musicals and revues on view and that does not include a play with music like the version of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Most of these are being given at very large theatres and some of them twice nightly. At the Palladium with twelve packed performances (apart from standing room) more than twenty-nine thousand can be seated in one week. With eight performances a week at the St. Martin's or Criterion, usually the homes of a good straight play, only four thousand two hundred can be seated. And most of the straight plays are given in theatres whose capacity averages about a third of that at Drury Lane.

Thus we have a three-tiered British theatre with a tiny experimental element, a small mid-brow element, and a much larger public for big scale musicals and revues, or for the kind of thing which is called a Summer Show at the seaside or a Pantomime for weeks or even months in winter. It is surely as valuable to preserve the small middle-class as it is to stimulate the tiny experimental class. It provides

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civilized entertainment and in the repertories it helps to finance the experiments. Also it provides a living and opportunities for actors on a scale that the experimental fringe can never do. As an actor who has appeared with distinction in all kinds of plays said to me, 'Destroy the stockbroker's theatre and we are finished.' He need not have put the emphasis on one profession commonly supposed to be gross and sedentary but which in fact contains a number of notable athletes and many who enjoy a walking race to Brighton.

The drama's service of this public was once admittedly too middle-class or upper-class in its settings and subjects; but recently it has had to meet the competition of working-class themes and environments, which was a welcome change. If the drama is to be any expression of a nation's problems and a picture of its people, it cannot be limited to those who own a cocktail shaker and regard a high tea as a barbaric way of eating. But there is very little evidence that those who enjoy tea and kippers at six o'clock will turn out at seven to go and see plays about people who are thus fed at a similar hour. When the Gaiety Theatre at Manchester was doing what London's Court Theatre is doing now it was said that a girl walking by protested to her young man, 'Don't let's go in there. It's just being at home.'

It is not denied that the Theatre Royal in Stratford East, depends on patrons from westerly or other areas and that so-called dustbin or kitchen sink plays are more likely to draw on the maisonettes of the middle-class intellectual than on the Council houses and flats of the weekly wage-earner who, incidentally, has probably more money to spend on theatre-going, if he chooses, than have the maisonettists.

The straight play in Central London and wherever else visible draws on a public that wants to see, well performed, something which is reasonably agreeable to the eye and neither strains nor insults the mind. Nowadays this kind of

piece is usually subjected to violent assault by certain critics who are 'committed' to the off-beat school of playwrights: the assaults, whatever their intention, are not always lethal: many long running successes have come unscathed through an initial pelting. But there does exist among the 'off-beat' fanciers the view that anything 'on-beat' is 'escapist' and therefore deplorable.

It is absurd to make 'escapist' a term of abuse. In a world as troubled as our own we have as much right to seek a refuge from reality in the theatre as in grand opera or ballet or a musical concert. The history of the theatre is a record of romance as well as of high tragedy. The Elizabethan public relished its escape into the Illyria of *Twelfth Night* or the Athens of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as much as into Hamlet's problem-stricken Elsinore.

No doubt our middle-brow retreats are not into such works of fancy and genius. But those who only go to watch a matrimonial tangle lightly treated or a murder tangle ingeniously woven have a right to that kind of entertainment which in turn has its right place as the second tier in our theatrical structure. Furthermore the people who discover the pleasures of playgoing in this way may come to value good acting and to appreciate more serious work later on. What the theatre as a whole needs is to improve the percentages which I mentioned at the beginning and to see the drama steadily and as a whole and not, as some theorists do, as only tolerable when it provides for the taste of a minority so small that it cannot possibly finance its own tastes and must live on the tax-payer. The providers of mid-brow theatre do not have an easy time and there are costly failures: but on the whole they pay their way and, with costs what they are, that is not contemptible. I do not suggest a continuous cheer for the theatre of entertainment, but I do find the continuous jeer, kept up in certain quarters, to be unjustified and offensive.

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Shakespeare's Life and Times

The Life of Shakespeare by F. E. Halliday. Duckworth. 25s. **Shakespeare the Dramatist** by Una Ellis-Fermor. Methuen. 25s.

The fact that Shakespeare 'spares but the cloudy border of his base To the foil'd searching of mortality' seems only to stimulate enthusiasm to prove how wrong Arnold was. The latest response is very good indeed, and embodying as it does the fruit of much recent and profitable research, rewards careful reading. The clouds have cleared a bit in recent years, and if little more is positively known about the facts of Shakespeare's life, a flood of information about the conditions under which he worked has been released by the researches of such scholars as Leslie Hotson, whom Mr. Halliday accepts as 'right in essentials', T. W. Baldwin and Glynne Wickham. In compellingly vigorous prose, the author shows himself intimately aware of all the labyrinthine windings of that ambivalent Elizabethan way of life, and if he has little himself to add that is new, he is a magnificent ringmaster and his gueswork is always shrewd, reasonable and constructive.

Thus, although nothing is positively known of Shakespeare's father's religious convictions, Mr. Halliday deduces from the known facts of his career that he was a pushing young man who was likely to identify himself with Protestantism and the new order. He suggests, too, that Shakespeare left Stratford without any fixed plan for his career, but it may well have been the thundering success of *Tamburlaine*, with which his arrival in London coincided, that sparked him off.

He even hazards the idea that Anne Shakespeare, left behind in Stratford, shared the Puritans' detestation of the theatre, and therefore led an unquiet life thinking of the temptations to which her husband's career exposed him. It is as likely an explanation as any other why Shakespeare never brought her and his family to share his life in London. Mr. Halliday is no dogmatic Polonius, saying 'Hath there been such a time That I have positively said "Tis so", when it prov'd otherwise', and his surmises bristle with such reservations as 'It may well be' and 'I suspect that'. But his speculations are of interest and weighty probability.

If the facts he adduces are not all new, they are freshly minted and imaginatively presented. Did Shakespeare's first sight of Edward Alleyn acting in Stratford in 1584 plant a seed of ambition? Did our term 'Box Office' have its origin in the box which the 'gatherers' used to collect the admission pennies from the audience? The Queen was at Charlecote on the eve of the massacre of St. Bartholomew in

1572, and Mr. Halliday's comment is typical of his method.

The people of Stratford with the Queen and her ministers just across the river, must have felt almost at the centre of events, and Hunt and his usher would find it difficult to make their boys concentrate on numbers, cases and genders.

Such transitions from the national to the local view and back again give the story historical balance. Always Shakespeare is presented as growing up in a world teeming with excitement and opportunity, in 'a proud, mercurial, quarrelsome, litigious, vivid society', in which to be young was very heaven — and Mr. Halliday is a master of effective quotation.

His style is engaging and he is as masterly in packing a short sentence full of punch and a twist of surprise in its tail ('The Puritans had a power of invective and a knowledge of bawdry exceeded only by Shakespeare') as he is of long set pieces of vivid description of London or Stratford. This is a fast-moving, authoritative and objective study, which caters little for those who like fire-works, macabre guts-burrowing, walking 'razor-edge', and the like. We can do without theorizing about Shakespeare's philosophy when there is in a biography such a sense of topicality as the reference to 'Westminster Abbey with its recent addition, the delicately traceried Chapel of Henry VII'.

Una Ellis-Fermor's *Shakespeare the Dramatist* is a very different cup of tea. It is a major work of imaginative criticism (even if one cannot swallow it all), and one realizes what was lost when she died before completing, or even putting into anything like final shape, what would obviously have been her *magnum opus*. Professor Kenneth Muir has done a faithful and skilful job of work in imposing something approaching form and continuity upon a mass of published and unpublished material.

Mrs. Ellis-Fermor follows Maurice Moggan in believing that 'Shakespeare reveals by secret impressions the underlying natures of his characters', and she hunts after these with zest. For her, Macduff tells nothing but reveals everything because we overhear his mind; Bolingbroke is eloquent when silent as a stone if we follow our imaginations; and though only a slender arc of the personalities of Banquo's murderers enters the frame of the play, the circle is complete beyond it. This speculation about the lives and characters beyond the play has its hazards and it is Coriolanus who is exposed to the full treatment. Here she is at her most interesting, most provocative and least convincing.

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sometimes she is able to bolster up her arguments by daring analogies. But she does not invariably ring the bell, and it is doubtful whether her lengthy and detailed parallel between the characters of Shakespeare and Corneille achieves much by way of illumination. Though the chapter on Ibsen is interesting enough in itself, one need be no Bardolater to boggle at the implication that the eminent Norwegian is the peer of Shakespeare, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. It is rather in useful references to Bunyan and Pirandello, to a character in Jane Austen, and to a poem of Thomas Hardy, to H.D.F. Kitto and C. Day Lewis, that she most effectively deploys her prodigious and ubiquitous reading, and what Professor Muir rightly describes as her combination of 'great intelligence with great integrity'.

JOHN GARRETT

Mrs. Pat

Mrs. Patrick Campbell by Alan Dent. *Museum Press. 30s.*

Although I never met Mrs. Patrick Campbell I detested her. It was partly because the only time I saw her act (as *Hedda Gabler*) she gave a monstrously insolent couldn't-care-less performance, and partly because of her persistent cruelty to an elderly actor friend of mine whom she drove out of her company by discovering a carefully concealed physical disability which she used to hint at during the play by inserting lines of subtle cruelty. Mr. Alan Dent in his biography makes no attempt to deny her ugly faults. He recounts examples of her outrageous fooling on the stage, such as pretending to fall asleep during the love scene in the second act of *Hedda Gabler*; and he gives, among examples of her 'occasional cruelty', a particularly revolting story of how she remarked in the hearing of a maidservant who was leaving the room, 'That's just the common little rickety walk I need for my Eliza'. Nevertheless, it would seem, from Mr. Dent's book, that to know Mrs. Pat was to forgive all—or, at least, nearly all. There is no doubt that many people who knew her adored her. Mr. Dent quotes lavishly from what has been said and written about her by her friends. They praise her for her unfailing fascination, her wit, her beauty, her vitality, her kindness on occasions (though even her warmest admirers admit that she hardly ever *said* a kind thing), her fundamental good nature and the frankness with which she admitted her faults. 'She knew she was a monster', Cecil Beaton wrote in his diary, 'and she was the first to laugh at herself'.

In spite of all the evidence which Mr. Dent has skilfully marshalled to prove the irresistible fascination she exercised over her friends one is still left vague as to the reasons for it. Plainly she was a great personality who could cast a spell over her friends, but those who

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have been spell-bound can rarely give a coherent and logical account of the spell that ensnared them; consequently all these praises of her as a woman, in spite of their warmth and sincerity, unfortunately do little to counteract the more factual evidence which shows her as an unlikeable, selfish, ill-disciplined actress who wantonly destroyed a great talent.

James Agate declared that he had seen only six great actresses and Mrs. Patrick Campbell was one of them. Mr. Dent's judgment is that she failed to achieve greatness because she lacked application and concentration, was hardly ever wholly dedicated, and had insufficient sincerity and depth of feeling. 'She lacked the great actress's shining gift of being nearly always at her best. She had acquired the technique of acting but was unable, all her life, to learn to deploy it properly and consistently . . . she was at her best only on rare occasions. She allowed moods to govern her, instead of learning to govern her moods'.

It has been said of her that she was essentially a personality actress who instead of characterizing her parts simply subdued them to herself. Mr. Dent demolishes this myth by pointing out that her three greatest triumphs were as Paula Tanqueray, Mélisande and Eliza Doolittle—and that three more utterly different species of womankind can hardly be found in the whole of drama. He goes on to speculate on how wonderful she might have been as Arkadina in *The Seagull*, Ranevsky in *The Cherry Orchard*, the wife in Strindberg's *The Father*, Gertrude in *Hamlet*. Charles Morgan said of her that 'in the acting of women with brains and with natures complex, strange, and highly strung she had not her equal on the English stage'.

The later chapters, which trace her disintegration as an actress until she became unemployable, make sad reading, especially as her downfall was largely due to the lack of something which nearly all actresses, even very bad actresses, possess—the desire to please an audience and excite their admiration. She lacked even the modicum of vanity essential to an actress. In her later years she allowed her figure to become bulky and shapeless, she took no trouble about the clothes she wore on the stage, and her hair was so untidy that it looked as if it was about to fall down. But it was not just the carelessness of her own performances which made her unemployable. As she grew older her perverse and often cruel sense of humour led her to wreck productions and undermine the self-confidence of those who acted with her. Yet it is only fair to recall that when she died John Gielgud wrote a letter to *The Times* ending with the words 'There's a great spirit gone'.

There are few good stage biographies: this is one of them. Pieced together from dramatic criticisms, letters, conversations with those who knew Mrs. Pat intimately, and her own published reminiscences, it could easily have

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been a scissors-and-paste book. Instead, because of the author's immense knowledge and understanding of the arts of acting and criticism, this is a genuinely critical biography of one of the most fascinating, talented, complex and exasperating women the English theatre has known.

NORMAN MARSHALL.

More Letters from Shaw

To a Young Actress. The Letters of Bernard Shaw to Molly Tompkins. *Constable.* 63s.

The royal advice to the historian of the Roman Empire 'Scribble, scribble, scribble, Mr. Gibbon!' could never have been made to Bernard Shaw. First, because G.B.S. always wrote with a clear hand far removed from a scribble and secondly because nothing would stop him. No amount of play-writing could check his letter-writing. The output of letters throughout his life was of a staggering quantity; the recipients might be people of small importance, but that made no difference. Both quantity and quality were sustained. Here is a whole volume of letters to a now forgotten and never prominent actress, Molly Tompkins, and there were also sixty to her husband Laurence and probably some more to Molly which have been lost.

Shaw was doubtless flattered by their devotion to his ideas: Laurence, a sculptor, and Molly, who had ambitions on the English stage, arrived from America in 1921 because they decided that the Shavian philosophy, political and biological, alone could save the world. They found their hero approachable, amenable and extremely kind. He entertained them and introduced them. He handed out advice to Molly on the entrance and maintenance of a stage career and thereafter, until he was over ninety, he continued to correspond, writing not only from his home but from the many British and foreign places where he went on holiday. Her letters to him he did not keep, but his have been treasured and now, edited by the Tompkins's son, they have been printed or reproduced in photostat for public contemplation.

They are not of much importance to Shaw's biographers, but they will be essential to the collectors of all that G.B.S. wrote. Fortunately, along with some trivialities, they include a good deal of comment on stage affairs. We learn, for example, some of Shaw's practices with regard to his own work.

I never look at a play after the first night and wouldn't look at it then (Pinero never does) if I didn't think my absence would be impolite to the company after all their work for me. No play was ever saved by tinkering or ever will be.

That reveals typical courtesy and also gives advice which is topically relevant, since today plays are taken out on tour before their London opening and continually tinkered with by the

managers and producers as well as the author, rarely, one gathers, to advantage.

There is interesting comment on acting. Shaw wrote to his 'Mollikins' about her acting:

I feel quite sure that you are cold and a stick as yet, because people with positive characters, like you, have a long struggle with their natural reserve and critical power whilst others, with no character at all and very little sense, find themselves in plays at once and exist only when they are on the stage. But the ones with the positive characters, who are selves not spooks, make the best actors when they go through with it and are indeed the only possible classical actors. Forbes Robertson is a case in point: he was cold, very handsome, constrained, and with an air of having been called away from some important business to do something distasteful on the stage: yet he became our best actor and is so still. (February 1924.) Mrs. Tompkins was fortunate indeed to be in constant receipt of letters of this kind. But the stage does not monopolize the commentary: all Shaw's favourite subjects, surgery and medicine, English Public Schools, the English ruling class, Russia, Ireland, music and even boxing are discussed and it is fascinating to learn that the creator of Cashel Byron would have found holiday life at Brioni intolerable had it not been for the company of Richard Strauss and the heavyweight champion, Gene Tunney.

It is obvious from the events of her life that Mrs. Tompkins was not always successful or fortunate, but in her ability to keep Shaw's pen in action she can fairly be called a very lucky woman.

IVOR BROWN

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As a small boy in America and later as a young man in Europe, James was a constant playgoer. In France he made an exhaustive study of Dumas, Augier and Sardou, and was able at one moment to write that he had the French theatre in his pocket. Yet, impatient though he was to 'get at' the theatre himself, he long delayed doing so, because, as Leon Edel clearly shows, he regarded it as a kind of prostitution. It held glamour and possible awards on the one hand; on the other, it was a 'most unholy trade'. The refined, somewhat esoteric novelist doubted his chances of success with that wider public which accorded cheers to Oscar Wilde and Henry Arthur Jones.

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Was it this doubt that led him in *Guy Domville* to switch from the delicate subtlety of the first act, in which he created an atmosphere perfectly attuned to his theme of a young man's spiritual conflict, to the melodramatic artificiality of the second? If he hoped by thus broadening his effects to sell himself to the philistines, he was disappointed. Inconsistency is the least forgivable dramatic crime, and the first night pit and gallery did not forgive it. Henry James was absent during the performance and, therefore, unaware of the rowdy disapproval that accompanied it. He arrived at the end, however, in time to be brought on to the stage by George Alexander and to be treated unmercifully. Just why he was allowed to appear before a manifestly hostile audience we shall never know.

Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, whose reviews are printed here in full, deplored the hooliganism and found much in the play to admire. Their criticisms differ from so many we read today in that they are totally devoid of venom, in spite of the fact that they all agreed as to the inadequacy of the second act.

HILARY GARDNER

Theatre History

The Theatres of London by Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson. Illustrated by Timothy Birdsall. Hart-Davis. 30s.

A keen student of the drama, while appreciating this book, complained to me that it contained nothing about London's theatres which have vanished altogether, such as the Princess's or the more recent war casualties such as the Shaftesbury and the Little. But that is an enormous subject and one volume cannot contain everything. This one does indeed contain much, since it concisely traces the history of all the theatrical buildings of central London on sites now occupied by existing homes of entertainment; and extremely numerous those reconstructions have been. The risks of destruction by fire were great in the age of candlelight and lamplight and later on 'development' took the place of conflagration as a destroyer. So many sites have been constantly reploughed and replanted. The Adelphi Theatre in the Strand is the fourth structure on soil once yielding milk and butter to the household of Charles II. Some of the rebuilding operations have been total innovations; others have added new interiors to old façades.

The Lyceum, for example, whose place in the drama's history has been intermittently august and absurd, still has the frontage which Irving knew; but, as the authors point out, a lot of sentimental nonsense has been talked of saving 'Irving's Lyceum' as though we had turned into the present dance-hall one of the high temples of English acting. The Lyceum of today, except for the façade, was built as a music-hall in 1904 and failed as such while the almost contemporary Coliseum had a great

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success. It became the very profitable workshop of the Melville Brothers, those managerial melodramatists who set an example to other managers by knowing their job sufficiently well to be able to write their own plays. It is true that *The Worst Woman in London* may not have been the best play in that city, but the Lyceum, both with pantomime and melodrama, had, during the first thirty years of this century, its own abiding personality and its place in the heart of the people.

A history of theatres leads into curious aspects of topography. Messrs. Mander and Mitchenson, if only for reasons of space, keep to the record of dates, architects, plays and players and have no room for atmospheric description. But strange things are revealed. When the London Hippodrome was opened at the beginning of this century the space taken by the front stalls was an arena whose floor could be raised to reveal a sizeable tank and the aquatic spectacles were as much the joy of Edwardian spectators as were similar displays at Sadler's Wells in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As a schoolboy I remember watching a bicyclist drop from a gangplank on the roof into the water, shedding his cycle as he fell, an exercise facilitated by the fact that he had only one leg. The water came, our authors tell us, from one of London's buried rivers, the Cran Bourne, which runs under the Hippodrome, just as the Tyburn, still present in a pipeline to be seen in Sloane Square station, trickles under or just beside the Royal Court. The recent kitchen sink plays there on view could have drawn their washing-up water from this brook, once dammed further north to make the Hyde Park Serpentine, if the plumbers had laid it on.

But historic trifles of this kind are only a small part of a large and industriously recorded story. Here is a valuable work of reference. The times and styles of the architecture (with useful illustration in line drawings) and the principal plays and players of the many houses are listed with precision. Like many good reference books, it not only supplies the facts but also makes agreeable browsing for those who are fascinated by all the changes and chances in the traffic of the stage.

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In *Search of Happiness* by *Viktor Rozov*. Evans. 6s. (7 m., 7 f. 1 set.) Wherein lies happiness? Not, we are warned by this Russian dramatist, in the accumulation of possessions. Little sympathy is extended to the young wife, who, seeking to draw her husband away from the communal family atmosphere into a flat of their own, amasses large quantities of furniture. Retribution comes when her brother-in-law, a fifteen-year-old poet, smashes it up in a fit of temper because she destroys his goldfish ('living things') after he has accidentally spilt

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ink on her new desk. This central incident points the moral and defines the viewpoints of the many characters. For the rest, the play, set in a typical Moscow flat, presents a lively picture of gregariousness. Hopes, fears, motivations and personal relationships are expressed in dialogue of considerable charm and humour.

Off a Duck's Back by Robert Kemp. French. 6s. (4 m., 4 f. 1 set.) Irony and paradox are the keynotes here. A rising politician, doted on by his mother, has to resign his seat for allowing a leakage in Budget secrets, while a ne'er-do-well intellectual, whose mother has washed her hands of him, wins a coveted literary prize and sells the film rights of a novel for £8,000. Others include a hearty clergyman, who has a knack of landing himself in compromising situations, the proprietress of the Italian *pension* in which the play is set and her two children, glamorous daughter and 'teen-age' son. A little weak in plot development, but strong in character contrast and amusing dialogue.

The Patchwork Quilt by Felicity Douglas. French. 6s. (6 m., 6 f. 1 set.) Madeline Hilliard, a charming, maddening woman, manipulates her family as easily as the patchwork at which she is endlessly working. A family holiday in Wales does not work out as she plans for her puppets refuse to dance to her tune. The quilt, symbol of the past, is flung aside in disgust, but is retrieved at the end when she convinces herself that nothing is really changed. The Welsh setting gives breadth to what might have been an overladen family atmosphere.

A Change of Air by Philip Johnson. French. 5s. (4 m., 6 f. 1 set.) Humour and pathos are cleverly intermingled in this vignette of a seaside boarding house, period 1910. The predominating note is tatty-theatrical, amongst the permanents being a *passé* actress and a couple from the local stock company. The visitors include a downtrodden London clerk, whose initiation into strong drink nearly loses him his job, and his daughter, who is being given her first glimpse of the sea and of life. The play, which offers first rate acting opportunities, satisfies on account of its well presented situations and expert construction.

French Polish by Stella Martin Currey. Evans. 6s. (4 m., 4 f. 1 set.) The havoc caused by a young French enchantress when she descends on an archaeologist and his family gives this comedy its title, but other themes, such as Christmas, the social revolution, youth, middle-age and family relationships, are equally important. The action is kept alive by a series of small climaxes rather than a sustained plot, and this makes it somewhat repetitive, but the characters are drawn with depth, and the dialogue is witty and intelligent.

Uncertain Glory by Elma Verity and Vera Allen. Deane. 5s. (4 m., 3 f. 1 set.) The wife of a retired brigadier becomes paralysed when she learns that her husband has been unfaithful to her in Germany. She goes to Switzerland

for a cure, and realizes on her return that his behaviour has been no worse than her own egotism.

The Shadow Witness by Falkland L. Cary and Philip Weathers. French. 5s. (4 m., 5 f. 1 set.) An Agatha Christie type of whodunit, well above the average. A French farmhouse setting gives it originality; the characters are well drawn and the family background convincing. An ingenious plot, involving the murder of a rich uncle, keeps one guessing to the end.

A Moment of Time by Janet Allen. Deane. 5s. (4 m., 2 f. 2 sets.) Stephen Fleming is acquitted of murder, but is he innocent? His behaviour suggests he is guilty, but his wife is convinced he is not. How much does the neurotic brother-in-law know about it all? This is a tautly constructed thriller, with a big surprise in the last line of the middle act.

The Danger Line by Stuart Ready. Deane. 5s. (3 m., 4 f. 1 set.) Dark doings in a Buckinghamshire village. A middle-aged spinster finds herself in possession of a diamond pendant, stolen by her sister. Her outwitting of the various unpleasant characters who discover her secret provides brisk entertainment.

Wanted—One Body! by Raymond Dyer. English Theatre Guild. 6s. (5 m., 4 f. 1 set.) This 'farical chiller', a burlesque of the sliding panel/disappearing corpses school, extracts every possible ounce of humour from a number of macabre situations. There are rewarding parts for a couple of solicitors, a doddering doctor, an undertaker, a comic maid and a villainous pair of twin sisters, who can be played by the same actress, since each is murdered in turn. Nobody dreams of sending for the police.

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The Eccentric by Dannie Abse. Evans. 2s. (5 m., 1 f.) Set in a decrepit tobacconist's shop kept by a very odd old man whose bugbear is conformity. His wife was killed by a bomb dropped by a pilot who obeyed orders—who, in fact, conformed. A clever off-beat play.

Night of the Fox by Joan Forman. Evans. 2s. (3 m., 2 f.) Caesar's Camp, 56 B.C. Caesar is ready to set out to conquer Britain, when a British Queen finds her way to his tent and tries to persuade him to abandon his project, which she argues is built on personal vanity. While she delays him the fog comes down and the last chance to invade that year is lost. Intelligent dialogue.

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A Family Occasion by Jill Glew and A. C. Thomas. French. 2s. (5 m., 4 f.) An unmarried daughter notifies her family of the death of their father and although they had neglected him while alive they flock to the funeral. But the announcement was only a ruse to get the family to attend the old man's birthday. An unusual play, in two scenes.

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Women at Peace by Joyce Dennys. French. 2s. (5 f.) A Puritan girl is suspected of treachery by the Royalist family for whom she works while, in fact, she has succeeded in directing Cromwell's men away from the farm where the son of the family is hiding.

Honey and Vinegar by Llywelyn W. Maddock. Deane. 1s. 9d. (5 f.) A country woman offers honey for sale to visitors, but behind this innocent front a smart business in 'antique' furniture is carried on. An unexpected ending.

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